

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTS TO BE PREPARED FOR PROPOSED ALASKA REFUGES AND RIVER CORRIDORS

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today announced that two Interior agencies will prepare environmental impact statements and supplements for the possible establishment of two national wildlife refuges in Alaska and the protection of eleven Alaskan river corridors.

"The purpose of the impact statements is to evaluate the expected results of various legislative or administrative alternatives designed to protect the natural resource values of these areas. Studies will be undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service," Andrus said.

The areas are the proposed Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge (3.5 million acres), Iliamna National Wildlife Refuge (5.7 million acres) and the following rivers (totaling up to 3 million acres): Alagnak, Birch Creek, Delta, Fortymile, Gulkana, Kisaralik, Koyuk, Melozitna, Nuyakuk, Susitna and Unalakleet. The refuges would be administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service according to provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, while the rivers would continue under the management of the Department's Bureau of Land Management.

"The proposed actions cover lands that were among those included in three year emergency withdrawals made by the Department in November, 1978," Andrus said, "to provide protection during ongoing Congressional deliberations for establishing new conservation system units in Alaska."

"If it appears that timely Congressional action on these Alaskan proposals will not be forthcoming this spring, finalizing these river corridor and refuge documents would complete the steps necessary to enable the Department to make final protective withdrawals of these challenging and scenic rivers and outstanding fish and wildlife habitats."

Andrus added, "These documents would describe not only our preferred legislative proposals, but also the Executive Branch alternatives available to the Department for protecting the outstanding resources of these Alaska lands."

(more)

For the purpose of scoping the issues to be addressed in these documents, the Department reviewed the extensive public comment record pertaining to ongoing congressional proposals for designation of these areas. The key issues identified are outlined in the February 5, Federal Register. Other substantial issues identified should be received in writing by February 25 and sent to: William C. Reffalt, Chief, ANCSA Staff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C. 20240.

For further information on National Wildlife Refuge proposals interested persons may contact Mr. Reffalt at this address or telephone (202) 343-7533. For further information on river corridors, contact Mr. John Haubert, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Washington, D. C. 20243 or telephone (202) 343-4793.

Further public comment will be sought on the draft NEPA documents through a later Federal Register.

"The Department's highest priority continues to be one of assisting the Congress on passing an acceptable bill this year," said Assistant Secretary Robert Herbst. "However the President has directed the Secretary to be prepared to protect these lands and waters and their superlative resources for the American peoples of today and tomorrow. We are now completing the steps necessary to meet that directive."

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